

Amendments to the Claims

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the above-identified patent application.

Listing of Claims

1. (Currently amended) A method of exercising access control over a television program, said method comprising the steps of:

inputting receiving, at a viewer input device, a password for entering into a master mode of operation;

in the master mode, for a first mode of operation different from the master mode:

entering receiving, at the viewer input device, a blocking criterion for blocking a television program from being accessed by a user in the first mode of operation, and

entering receiving, at the viewer input device, an unblocking criterion for unblocking a blocked television program to permit, without providing the password, access to the blocked program by the user in the first mode of operation if the blocked program meets the unblocking criterion; and

in the master mode, for a second mode of operation different from the master mode and the first mode:

selecting allowing the selection, at the viewer input device, of one or more programs for access by a user in the second mode of operation, and

a processor permitting only the selected programs to be accessed in the second mode without providing the password, to the exclusion of all other programs being telecast.

2-9. (Canceled)

10. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the password is established by a first-time user.

11. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the password can be changed by a user when in the master mode.

12. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the password can be changed by repeatedly entering an incorrect password for a predetermined number of times and confirming the repeatedly entered password at the end of the entering step.

13. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the master mode of operation remains in effect until a television configured to display the television program is turned off, the user exits the master mode, or a time delay expires.

14. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1 further comprising the processor denying access to a television configured to display the television program until the password is properly entered received, after a power outage.

15. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1 wherein the blocking and unblocking criteria are entered received in a normal television picture viewing mode using via selections from an on-screen menu.

16. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1 wherein the blocking and unblocking criteria are entered received at the viewer input device in a guide mode using an on-screen menu activated from a program schedule guide.

17. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the second mode of operation is a babysitting mode.

18. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1 wherein the steps of entering receiving the criteria at the viewer input device comprise:

Selecting allowing the selection, at the viewer input device, of a television program to be accessed in the first mode of operation;

activating receiving an activation at the viewer input device of a first on-screen button to block the selected program if the selected program is unblocked; and

activating receiving an activation at the viewer input device of a second on-screen button to unblock the selected program if the selected program is blocked.

19. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1 wherein the steps of entering receiving the criteria comprise:

tuning to a television program;

activating receiving an activation at the viewer input device of a first on-screen button to block the television program if the program is unblocked; and

activating receiving an activation at the viewer input device of a second on-screen button to unblock the television program if the program is blocked.

20. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1 wherein the step of entering receiving the blocking criterion comprises inputting receiving, at the viewer input device, a parental control level, the method further comprising:

the processor extracting a parental control rating from a television signal carrying the selected program, comparing the rating with the parental control level, and blocking the selected program if its rating falls below the parental control level.

21. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein one of the criteria is blocking a television channel or television program, or unblocking a blocked television channel or television program.

22. (Previously presented) The method of claim 21 wherein the blocked or unblocked television channel or program is marked in a parental control review list.

23. (Currently amended) The method of claim 22 wherein the steps of entering receiving the criteria comprise editing receiving edits, at the viewer input device, of the parental control review list with respect to channel, date, time and length.

24. (Previously presented) The method of claim 16 wherein the on-screen menu includes a grid feature for blocking or unblocking all television channels whether or not the channels are already blocked or unblocked, a sort feature for blocking or unblocking all television programs in a category, and a time feature for blocking or unblocking by a time of a day or a day of a week.

25. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising the processor providing access to a predetermined set of functions specified in a user profile if ~~the user does not enter the password~~ is not received at the viewer input device.

26. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising the processor restoring the blocking criterion after the user is no longer in the master mode.

27. (Currently amended) An apparatus for parental control of a television comprising: means for inputting a password for entering into a master mode of operation; means for entering, in the master mode, a blocking criterion for blocking a television program from being accessed by a user in a first mode of operation ~~different from the master mode~~;

means for entering, in the master mode, an unblocking criterion for unblocking a blocked television program to permit, without providing the password, access to the blocked program by the user in the first mode of operation if the blocked program meets the unblocking criterion;

means for selecting, in the master mode, of one or more programs for access by a user in a second mode of operation ~~different from the master mode and the first mode~~ and;

means for permitting only the selected programs to be accessed in the second mode without providing the password, to the exclusion of all other programs being telecast; and means for restoring the blocking criterion after the user is no longer in the master mode.

28. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 27 wherein the master mode of operation remains in effect until the television is turned off, the user exits the master mode, or a time delay expires.

29. (Canceled)

30. (Currently amended) The apparatus of claim 27, further comprising means for entering, in the master mode, a second blocking criterion for blocking television programs from being accessed in at least one of the first or second modes.

31. (Currently amended) A method of exercising access control over a television, said method comprising the steps of:

inputting receiving, at a viewer input device, a password for entering into a master mode of operation, wherein the master mode of operation remains in effect until the television is turned off, the user exits the master mode, or a time delay expires;

in the master mode, for a first mode of operation different from the master mode:

entering receiving, at the viewer input device, a first blocking criterion for blocking a television program from being accessed by a user in the first mode of operation, and

entering receiving, at the viewer input device, an unblocking criterion for unblocking a blocked television program to permit access to the blocked program by the user in the first mode of operation, if the blocked program meets the unblocking criterion; and

in the master mode, for a second mode of operation different from the master mode and the first mode:

selecting allowing the selection, at the viewer input device, of one or more programs for access by a user in the second mode of operation, and

a processor permitting only the selected programs to be accessed in the second mode without providing the password, to the exclusion of all other programs being telecast.

32. (Currently amended) The method of claim 31, further comprising entering receiving, at the viewer input device and in the master mode, a second blocking criterion for blocking television programs from being accessed in the first mode of operation.

33. (Currently amended) A method of exercising access control over a television, said method comprising the steps of:

inputting receiving, at a viewer input device, a password for entering into a master mode of operation;

in the master mode, selecting allowing the selection, at the viewer input device, of one or more television programs for access by a user in a viewing mode different from the master mode; and

a processor permitting only the selected programs to be accessed in the viewing mode without providing the password, to the exclusion of all other programs being telecast.

34. (Currently amended) A method of exercising access control over a television, said method comprising the steps of:

receiving, at a viewer input device, a password for entering into a master mode of operation;

storing, in a memory, a first criterion for blocking a television program from being accessed by a user in a first mode of operation different from the master mode, based on stored information relating to the television program;

storing, in the memory, a second criterion for unblocking a blocked television program to permit, without providing the password, access to the blocked program by a user in the first mode of operation if the blocked program meets the second criterion;

receiving, at the viewer input device, a user selection of one or more programs for access by a user in a second mode of operation different from the master mode and the first mode; and a processor permitting only the selected programs to be accessed in the second mode without providing the password, to the exclusion of all other programs being telecast.

35. (Currently amended) The method of claim 34, further comprising storing, in the memory, a third criterion for blocking television programs from being accessed in the first mode of operation.

36. (Currently amended) A method of exercising access control over a television, said method comprising the steps of:

receiving, at a viewer input device, a password for entering into a master mode of operation, wherein the master mode of operation remains in effect until the television is turned off, [[the]] a user exits the master mode, or a time delay expires;

storing, in a memory, a first criterion for blocking a television program from being accessed by a user in a first mode of operation different from the master mode, based on stored information relating to the television program;

storing, in the memory, a second criterion for unblocking a blocked television program to permit, without providing the password, access to the blocked program by a user in the first mode of operation if the blocked program meets the second criterion;

receiving, at the viewer input device and in the master mode, a user selection of one or more programs for access by a user in a second mode of operation different from the master mode and the first mode; and

a processor permitting only the selected programs to be accessed in the second mode without providing the password, to the exclusion of all other programs being telecast.

37. (Currently amended) The method of claim 36, further comprising storing, in the memory, a third criterion for blocking television programs from being accessed in the first mode of operation.

38. (Currently amended) An apparatus for parental control of a television comprising:
means for inputting a password for entering into a master mode of operation;
means for selecting, in the master mode, one or more television programs for access by a user in a viewing mode different from the master mode; and

means for permitting only the selected programs to be accessed in the viewing mode without providing the password, to the exclusion of all other programs being telecast.

39. (Currently amended) An apparatus for parental control of a television comprising:

means for receiving a password for entering into a master mode of operation;

means for storing a first criterion for blocking a television program from being accessed by a user in a first mode of operation different from the master mode, based on stored information relating to the television program;

means for storing a second criterion for unblocking a blocked television program to permit, without providing the password, access to the blocked program by a user in the first mode of operation if the blocked program meets the second criterion;

means for receiving, in the master mode, a user selection of one or more programs for access by a user in a second mode of operation different from the master mode and the first mode; and

means for permitting only the selected programs to be accessed in the second mode without providing the password, to the exclusion of all other programs being telecast.

40. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 39, further comprising:

means for selecting a program for access by a user not in the master mode;

means for determining whether the selected program is blocked from access;

means for prompting the user to enter the password if the selected program is blocked from access; and

means for unblocking the selected program for access, if the user enters the password responsive to the prompt.

41. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

selecting allowing the selection, at the viewer input device, of a program for access by a user not in the master mode;

the processor determining whether the selected program is blocked from access;

the processor prompting the user to enter the password if the selected program is blocked from access; and

the processor unblocking the selected program for access, if the user enters the password is received at the viewer input device responsive to the prompt.

42. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 27, further comprising:

means for selecting a program for access by a user not in the master mode;

means for determining whether the selected program is blocked from access;

means for prompting the user to enter the password if the selected program is blocked from access; and

means for unblocking the selected program for access, if the user enters the password responsive to the prompt.

43. (Currently amended) The method of claim 31, further comprising:

selecting allowing the selection, at a viewer input device, of a program for access by a user not in the master mode;

the processor determining whether the selected program is blocked from access;
the processor prompting the user to enter the password if the selected program is blocked from access; and
the processor unblocking the selected program for access, if the user enters the password responsive to the prompt.

44. (Currently amended) The method of claim 33, further comprising:
selecting allowing the selection, at a viewer input device, of a program for access by a user not in the master mode;
the processor determining whether the selected program is blocked from access;
the processor prompting the user to enter the password if the selected program is blocked from access; and
the processor unblocking the selected program for access, if the user enters the password is received at the viewer input device responsive to the prompt.

45. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 38, further comprising:
means for selecting a program for access by a user not in the master mode;
means for determining whether the selected program is blocked from access;
means for prompting the user to enter the password if the selected program is blocked from access; and
means for unblocking the selected program for access, if the user enters the password responsive to the prompt.